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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 000691

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS END STRIKE, SECONDARY  
TEACHERS SUSPEND THEIRS, GBAGBO PLAYS KEY ROLE

REF: A. A) ABIDJAN 633

[1](#)B. B) ABIDJAN 688

Classified By: DCM V. VALLE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Close on the heels of his success in resolving the impasse over the return of opposition deputies to the National Assembly (reftel), President Gbagbo reinforced his standing as a decisive leader by persuading striking university professors (reftels) to return to work. Secondary school teachers have also suspended their strike for two weeks after meeting with Gbagbo. Only some primary school teachers in Abidjan continue to boycott classes although secondary teachers have threatened to go back on strike if their negotiations fail to yield any progress within two weeks. The (perhaps only temporary) resolution of the strikes eliminates or at least postpones an unwelcome distraction for the Prime Minister and lessens the chances of student-led demonstrations. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Gbagbo met with leaders of the Coordination Nationale des Enseignants du Supérieur et des Chercheurs (CNEC), the group of university professors that has spearheaded the illegal strike, on June 21. The President offered the group no additional concessions beyond the modest ones previously offered by the Prime Minister, which allowed for extended retirement conditions and additional research allowances. Nevertheless, after CNEC members met on June 23, the professors decided to return to work.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The coordinator of CNEC, Professor Flavien Traore, told us that the organization is continuing negotiations with an interministerial commission and that it has not ruled out a resumption of the strike in the future. CNEC has submitted a list of more than ten grievances, the most important of which calls for a salary increase. According to Traore, the President and Prime Minister have told the CNEC that they want to address the issue of civil servant salaries globally rather than respond to only one group's demands while others are also clamoring for an increase.

[1](#)4. (U) Professors have now resumed classes and are scrambling to make up for lost classes. As each university faculty is autonomous, Traore said each one will decide whether to meet during the normal summer recess of August-September in order to start the new academic year on time in October, or whether to wait until October to resume classes, in which case the new school year would not begin until January 2007. Other alternatives are also possible. For example, according to Traore, the Faculty of Medicine will hold classes until August 31, which will allow them to complete the year before going on vacation.

[1](#)5. (U) University professors have also agreed to participate in the administration of Baccalaureat exams for secondary school graduates in July and August. These exams are a prerequisite for attending university.

¶6. (U) Various unions representing secondary school teachers have also suspended their strike after meeting with President Gbagbo on June 20. The teachers' demands have not been satisfied but they have agreed to allow for two more weeks of negotiations. If there is no progress in that time, they have threatened to resume their strike. This leaves only some primary school teachers still on strike, as a result of which a number of primary schools in Abidjan are closed. In addition, private primary and secondary school owners, who had previously threatened to shut down their schools unless they were paid the subsidies the government owes them, appear to have been mollified for now.

¶7. (C) Comment: The abatement in teacher strikes is good news and lessens the possibility of violence by disgruntled students and agitators fomenting unrest for political ends. The university professors at least, who had seized what they perceived to be an opportune moment to press for salary increases and other benefits, finally appear to have realized that the government was not prepared to yield to their demands. No doubt they also felt pressured as well by unhappy students and their parents. It is not clear at this point whether the secondary teachers are serious about resuming their strike if, as seems likely, they fail to obtain additional concessions from the government. In any case, the return of the university professors to work and the at least temporary suspension of the secondary teachers' strike offer a welcome respite for Banny, who can ill afford to spend time on these relatively minor distractions. However, it is President Gbagbo who has been strengthened by his role in enticing the teachers back to work without offering them additional concessions.  
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